

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY
(COMIC BOOKS)

HEARINGS
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE
JUVENILE DELINQUENCY
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
UNITED STATES SENATE
EIGHTY-THIRD CONGRESS
SECOND SESSION
PURSUANT TO
S. 190

INVESTIGATION OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY IN THE
UNITED STATES

APRIL 21, 22, AND JUNE 4, 1954

Printed for the use of the Committee on the Judiciary



UNITED STATES
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON : 1954

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¹ Herbert Wilton Beaser succeeded Herbert J. Hannoch as Chief Counsel to the subcommittee on May 1, 1954.

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JUVENILE DELINQUENCY
(Comic Books)

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21, 1954

UNITED STATES SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE COMMITTEE ON
THE JUDICIARY, TO INVESTIGATE JUVENILE DELINQUENCY,
New York, N. Y.

The subcommittee met at 10 a. m., pursuant to call, in room 110, United States Courthouse, New York, N. Y., Senator Robert C. Hendrickson (chairman of the subcommittee), presiding.

Present: Senators Hendrickson, Kefauver, and Hennings.

Also present: Herbert J. Hanoach, chief counsel; Herbert Wilson Beaser, associate chief counsel; and Richard Clendenen, executive director.

The CHAIRMAN. This meeting of the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency will now be in order.

Today and tomorrow the United States Senate Subcommittee Investigating Juvenile Delinquency, of which I am the chairman, is going into the problem of horror and crime comic books. By comic books, we mean pamphlets illustrating stories depicting crimes or dealing with horror and sadism. We shall not be talking about the comic strips that appear daily in most of our newspapers.

And we shall be limiting our investigation to those comic books dealing with crime and horror. Thus, while there are more than a billion comic books sold in the United States each year, our subcommittee's interest lies in only a fraction of this publishing field.

Authorities agree that the majority of comic books are as harmless as soda pop. But hundreds of thousands of horror and crime comic books are peddled to our young people of impressionable age.

You will learn during the course of these hearings that we shall also not be speaking of all crime comic books. Some of the types of crime and horror comic books with which we are concerned have been brought into the hearing room for your attention.

I wish to state emphatically that freedom of the press is not at issue in this investigation. The members of this Senate subcommittee—Senator Kefauver, Senator Hennings, and Senator Langer—as well as myself as chairman, are fully aware of the long, hard, bitter fight that has been waged to achieve and preserve the freedom of the press, as well as the other freedoms in our Bill of Rights which we cherish in America.

We are not a subcommittee of blue-nosed censors. We have no preconceived notions as to the possible need for new legislation. We want to find out what damage, if any, is being done to our children's minds by certain types of publications which contain a substantial

degree of sadism, crime, and horror. This, and only this, is the task at hand.

Since last November the subcommittee has been holding many public hearings into the various facets of the whole problem of juvenile delinquency. The volume of delinquency among our young has been quite correctly called the shame of America. If the rising tide of juvenile delinquency continues, by 1960 more than one and a half million American youngsters from 10 through 17 years of age, will be in trouble with the law each year.

Our subcommittee is seeking honestly and earnestly to determine why so many young Americans are unable to adjust themselves into the lawful pattern of American society. We are examining the reason why more and more of our youngsters steal automobiles, turn to vandalism, commit holdups, or become narcotic addicts.

The increase in craven crime committed by young Americans is rising at a frightening pace. We know that the great mass of our American children are not lawbreakers. Even the majority of those who get into trouble with our laws are not criminal by nature.

Nevertheless, more and more of our children are committing serious crimes. Our subcommittee is working diligently to seek out ways and means to check the trend and reverse the youth crime pattern.

We are perfectly aware that there is no simple solution to the complex problem of juvenile delinquency. We know, too, that what makes the problem so complex is its great variety of causes and contributing factors. Our work is to study all these causes and contributing factors and to determine what action might be taken.

It would be wrong to assume that crime and horror comic books are the major cause of juvenile delinquency. It would be just as erroneous to state categorically that they have no effect whatsoever in aggravating the problem. We are here to determine what effect on the whole problem of causation crime and horror comic books do have.

From the mail received by the subcommittee, we are aware that thousands of American parents are greatly concerned about the possible detrimental influence certain types of crime and horror comic books have upon their children.

We firmly believe that the public has a right to the best knowledge regarding this matter. The public has the right to know who is producing this material and to know how the industry functions.

Our work during this investigation will be to determine the possible delinquency producing effect upon children of certain types of crime and horror comic books, and whether or not there are certain offshoots growing out of the industry.

This phase of our investigation is but the first of several into questionable, or, should I say, disturbing phases of the mass media fields.

At a later date, the subcommittee will be attempting to determine what negative effects, if any, upon children, are exerted by other types of publications, by the radio, the television, and the movies. This is not to say that juvenile delinquency is wholly or even substantially the result of certain programs and subject matters presented by the mass media. But there can be no question that the media plays a significant role in the total problem.

I will now ask the assistant counsel to call the first witness.

Senator KEFAUVER. Mr. Chairman, before we call the first witness, I just want to compliment the chairman upon a very excellent statement of the purposes of this subcommittee and of this hearing here.

I would like to reemphasize that I feel that congressional hearings must be related to something that the Federal Government has jurisdiction of. This subcommittee is looking into the violations of various Federal laws, such as the Dyer Act, Mann Act, violations of the interstate commerce, and in connection with the subject matter under investigation we, of course, do have a postal statute which prohibits the mailing or using the mails for the distribution and dissemination of indecent and scurrilous literature which will be part of the subject matter of this hearing.

The CHAIRMAN. That is correct, Senator.

Senator KEFAUVER. I think it is also important to point out that Mr. J. Edgar Hoover's report of yesterday shows that whereas the increase in population last year was 5 percent, crime had gone up 20 percent and the particularly large increase was in connection with burglary and stealing of automobiles.

The interesting point is that a large part of the burglaries was committed by juveniles. Also juveniles, according to the FBI report, comprise 53.6 percent of those arrested for stealing automobiles.

As the chairman said, we do not have all the answers, but I think that it is important to look into the various matters which Mr. Hoover and other experts do bring out in connection with the increase in juvenile delinquency; and certainly as to horror and crime comics, not the good kind as the chairman said, but the various small part, most all the witnesses do have something to say about these.

We are not going into this hearing with the idea of condemning anybody or censoring the press or impairing the freedom of the press and bringing out in relation to a Federal statute something so that all of these experts on juvenile delinquency are talking about.

That is my understanding.

The CHAIRMAN. The Senator from Tennessee is entirely correct and the Chair wishes to congratulate and commend the Senator for his contribution.

Now, will counsel call the first witness?

Mr. BEASER. Mr. Richard Clendenen.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you will give before this subcommittee of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Mr. CLENDENEN. I do.

The CHAIRMAN. The Chair with pleasure announces the presence of the distinguished Senator from Missouri, Senator Hennings.

**TESTIMONY OF RICHARD CLENDENEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
UNITED STATES SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE
JUVENILE DELINQUENCY**

Mr. BEASER. For the record will you state your name, your address, and your present occupation?

Mr. CLENDENEN. My name is Richard Clendenen, 1445 Ogden Street NW., Washington, D. C.